

The "Minute Man" and the Scapegoat

The "*ish itti*" — the man prepared for taking the scapegoat into the wilderness and pushing it off a cliff — did not have to be a *kohen*. This mishnaic ruling is derived from the word "*ish*" (man), which indicates that any Jewish man qualified.

Why, asks the *gemara*, did the Torah need to use a special term to teach this? Taking the scapegoat to its death is not a service in the *Beis Hamikdash*, so why would one have assumed that it required a *kohen*?

The *gemara* explains that since the Torah uses the term "atonement" regarding the scapegoat, which symbolically carries all the sins of Israel (*Vayikra 16:10,22*), we might have assumed that it has the status of a sacrifice and is therefore relegated only to *kohanim*. The Torah therefore uses the word "*ish*" to qualify a non-*kohen* as well.

Rabbi Zvi Hirsh Chayos raises an interesting question in his commentary. The *gemara* (*Yoma 64a*) equates pushing the scapegoat to its death to the act of slaughtering. And we know that, unlike all subsequent sacrificial procedures, slaughtering a sacrifice does not require a *kohen* (*Berachos 31b*). If a non-*kohen* can slaughter a sacrificial animal, why should I assume that pushing the scapegoat off the cliff — which is equivalent to slaughtering — should require a *kohen*?

To solve this problem, Rabbi Zvi Hirsh Chayos notes the *gemara's* ruling (*Yoma 32b*) that all procedures of the Yom Kippur service in the *Beis Hamikdash* must be performed by the *kohen gadol*, including slaughtering. Without the word "*ish*" to teach us otherwise, we would have assumed that even the atonement achieved with the pushing of the scapegoat off the cliff must be done by the *kohen gadol*, not by a regular *kohen*, and certainly not by a non-*kohen*.

Yoma 67a

Restorers of the Crown's Glory

"*Anshei Knesses Hagedolah* — Men of the Great Assembly." This is the title given to the extraordinary body of 120 Sages, including the last of the Prophets, who led the Jewish People at the beginning of the Second *Beis Hamikdash* era.

How did they gain the title "great?" asks Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi. "By restoring," he answers, "the crown to its former glory."

This Sage cites four passages to explain this point.

- Moshe referred to Hashem as "Great, Mighty and Awesome." (*Devarim 10:17*)
- Yirmiyahu described Hashem as "Great and Mighty" (*Yirmiyahu 32:18*) but did not use the term "Awesome."
- Daniel directed his prayer to the "Great and Awesome G-d" (*Daniel 9:4*) but did not mention "Mighty."
- The *Anshei Knesses Hagedolah* returned to Moshe's full, original praise of Hashem, referring to Him as "Great, Mighty and Awesome." (*Nechemia 9:32*)

Why did Yirmiyahu and Daniel, each in his own era, delete one of the praises mentioned by Moshe? Yirmiyahu saw the Babylonian heathens noisily carousing in the Sanctuary and asked himself "Where is G-d's Awesomeness?" He therefore deleted "Awesome" from his praise.

Daniel saw the Babylonians and Persians subjugating the Jews during the seventy years of exile and asked himself "Where is G-d's Might?" He therefore deleted "Mighty" from his praise.

The *Anshei Knesses Hagedolah* offered another perspective in their time. "On the contrary," they said, "G-d's might is expressed in the power to restrain Himself and allow the heathens to carry out their oppression (so that their victims will be moved to repentance). G-d's Awesomeness is expressed in Jewish survival amongst the nations." ("How great is the lamb which survives against seventy wolves!" said the Roman ruler Andrianus to Rabbi Yehoshua about Jewish survival. "How great is the Shepherd who saves them!" answered the Sage. — *Midrash Tanchuma*)

How could Yirmiyahu and Daniel, asks the *gemara*, divert from the praise instituted by Moshe? These sages, explains Rabbi Elazar, were aware how much Hashem values truth, and they would not be untruthful in any way.

Maharsha reconciles the divergences in the praises by pointing out that each of the aforementioned praised Hashem according to what he witnessed in his own time. All of them spoke of Hashem's Greatness which is revealed at all times in His creation. Moshe, who witnessed Hashem's power in the miracles of the Exodus from Egypt and forty years in the wilderness, added "Mighty and Awesome." Yirmiyahu saw the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash* and could not truthfully testify to witnessing G-d's "Awesomeness." He therefore deleted this term from his praise. Daniel did not witness that destruction and was still able to experience Hashem's "Awesomeness," but he and his generation suffered what Yirmiyahu did not — enslavement in Babylonian captivity. He could therefore not truthfully testify to Hashem's "Might." Therefore he deleted that term.

The *Anshei Knesses Hagedolah*, however, arrived on the scene at the end of that seventy year exile. They witnessed the miraculous survival of their people in the face of so many troubles, such as the deliverance from Haman's genocidal plot. In retrospect, they were capable of truthfully testifying, on the basis of their own experience, to Hashem's Might, expressed in His restraint which allowed time for the lesson to be learned, and the Awesomeness evident in Jewish survival.

Yoma 69b

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